

What Can We Do?

We all are guilty of producing noise from time to time but there are many ways in which we can cut down on our share of unwanted sound. Here are some ways. You can probably think of others.

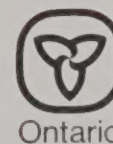
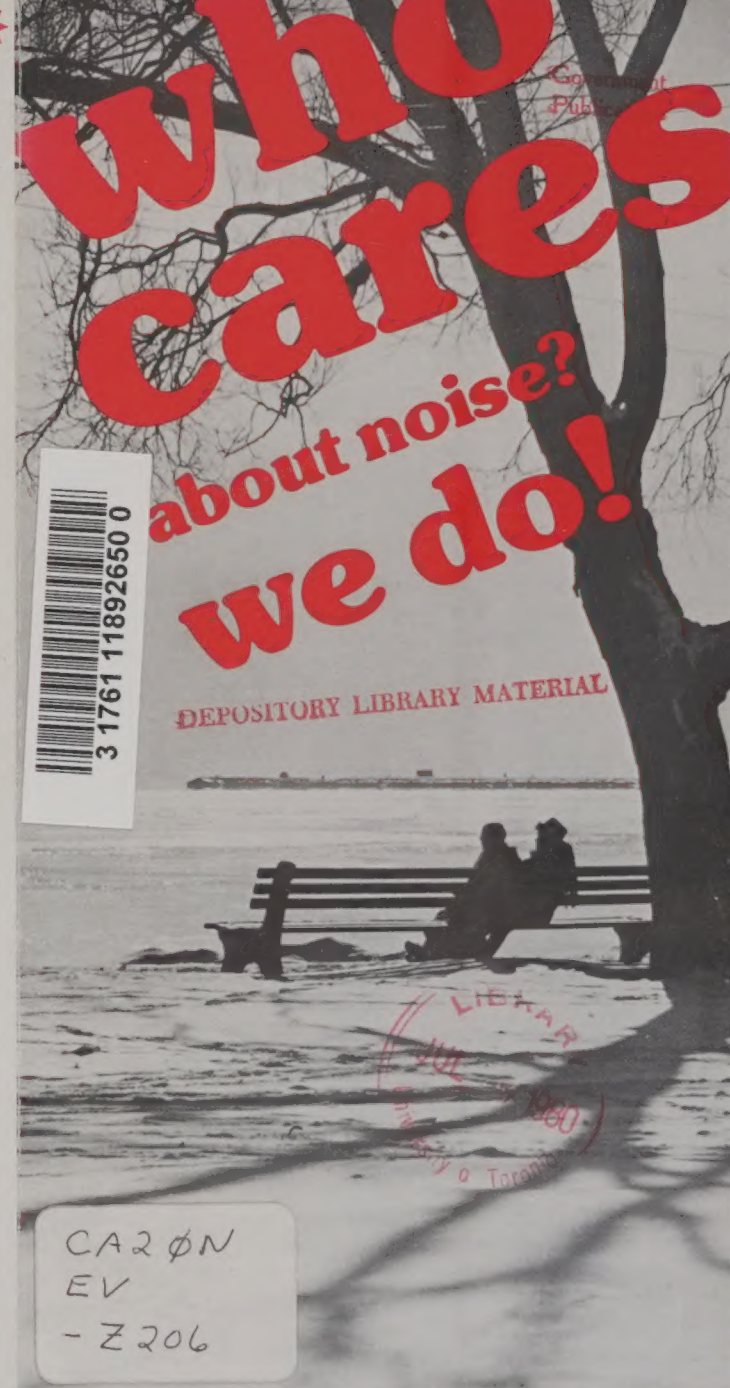
- Be kind to your ears and turn down the volume! Play music for yourself, not for your neighbors.
 - Everyone loves children, but *noisy* children should be asked to play loud games in parks and playgrounds where they won't bother anyone.
 - Is your car running quietly? Is your muffler working the way it should? If not, get it fixed!
 - Using lawn mowers, snowmobiles and other power equipment early in the morning or late at night may irritate your neighbors. Be considerate.
 - Dogs make great pets, but they sometimes bark at very odd hours. Try to quiet your pet.
- And, remember, everyone makes noise, so fighting noise pollution is everyone's concern! In a quiet way, let's show everyone that

we care!

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The ominous rumble

The sound of the city... sometimes it's exciting. More often, it leaves people flustered and annoyed.

Streetcars, buses, subway trains, cars, road crews using heavy equipment, emergency vehicles, blaring loud speakers — all make up the noisy din of our cities and towns.

But some sound can be soothing. Sounds can convey pleasant memories of nostalgic times. The lonesome wail of the loon heard on a camping trip. The bay of a pursuing hound.

Everyone reacts differently to sound. The loon may send exciting shivers up and down one's spine or fill another with fear. The dog on his hunt may excite his master but infuriate another trying to sleep.

What Is Noise?

One of the problems in defining noise is that it means different things to different people. Nonetheless noise is a pollutant and like all pollutants can be harmful.

Simply, noise is unwanted sound. It is measured in decibels on a scale which corresponds closely to the sound heard by the human ear. The faintest detectable sound is 0 decibels. A soft whisper is 30. A nearby jet taking off can produce 130 decibels.

At work, at home and at play, people are continually bombarded by unwanted sound. Wherever you work, noise is a constant and unwelcome companion.

Even at home, noise can be a nuisance. Radios and television sets, vacuum cleaners, the neighbor's children all can contribute to a background racket that can be annoying.

Over and above this, noise may produce severe physical and emotional effects.

Continuous high level noise over a long period of time may cause hearing damage. Temporary

deafness may be caused by even brief exposure to levels of 100 to 105 decibels. Most cases of actual hearing loss are due to industrial noise, the result of continuous exposure to high levels over a period of years, but there are case histories of hearing impairment caused by loud rock music.

Noise may increase body tension, affect blood pressure and the functions of the heart and nervous system. It may also cause the skin to turn pale, muscles to tense, blood vessels to constrict and is believed to trigger such ailments as allergies and stomach ulcers.

Noise alone would not ordinarily unbalance a well-adjusted person. Combined with other stress factors — financial problems, domestic crisis, illness and fatigue — it has been known to provoke a strong emotional response.

Regulating Noise

Laws regulating noise vary. In some countries, transistor radios are banned in public places, vehicles have been silenced and even model airplanes have mufflers. Sweden has passed legislation against sonic booms. The French confiscate cars ticketed for repeated noise violations. Moscow bans needless horn-blowing and several German towns close roads to motor traffic at night.

In Canada, noise regulations also vary considerably. Several provinces have different laws concerning noise. Many cities have their own noise bylaws, but these have proven difficult to enforce.

The Ontario Municipal Act gives municipalities the power to pass local bylaws covering "unusual noises, or noises likely to disturb the inhabitants." For this reason, most city bylaws are written in these terms. To get a conviction is must be proven that the noise in question is either unusual or likely to disturb inhabitants.

Towards a Quieter Future

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment is concerned with the increasing levels of noise pollution found in all major urban centres. Noise is best defined as "unwanted sound" and today's society is being saturated by this potentially harmful form of energy.

Whether unwanted sound originates from a faulty muffler or a factory's heavy machinery, noise has become this province's fourth great pollutant after air pollution, water pollution and solid waste.

Environment Ontario has developed a Model Municipal Noise Bylaw to assist municipalities in regulating noise. Since sources of noise and noise levels differ from one community to another, the Model Bylaw was designed to allow municipalities to apply appropriate segments of the bylaw to the special concerns of their communities.

The bylaw authorizes noise bylaw officers or peace officers to control clearly audible sounds such as noisy combustion engines, boisterous parties, and even barking dogs. These are classified as nuisance noise sources and to a certain extent they are already controlled in most communities, but the Model Municipal Noise Bylaw will give communities more control and authority over these noise sources.

In addition, officials may wish to classify certain areas of their municipalities. Residential areas should be kept relatively free of high noise levels while industrial and commercial areas can tolerate more noise.

Not all residential areas can be completely free of industrial noise, and it is up to municipalities and Environment Ontario to work with offending industries to bring their unwanted sound down to acceptable levels.

Environment Ontario's Model Municipal Noise Bylaw is a step towards a less-noisy environment. Its success depends on co-operation at all levels of government — federal, provincial and municipal, but to a great extent depends also on co-operation between individuals.